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ABSTRACT

The concept of peer advising to supplement faculty efforts was initiated in 1981 by students in the School of Business at Ithaca College. In order to increase personalized assistance, a group of students was selected and trained in School of Business procedures, basic counseling, and college services. Peer advisers must meet a grade point average standard and submit an application with two faculty recommendations. A team of peer advisers and a faculty adviser review the applications, and final applicants undergo interviews. A 2-day training program involves team building, basic counseling skills, college support services, the writing and reading center, the educational opportunity program, and the counseling center. While continuing to provide drop-in advising services to students, peer advisers now have increased responsibilities, including newsletter writing and participating in interviews with prospective students and their parents. As part of evaluation of the peer advising service, data have been collected on the number of student requests for specific services. Common role play situations that are used for peer adviser training are identified. A list of questions for peer advising interviews and a rating form for the interviews are included. (SW)

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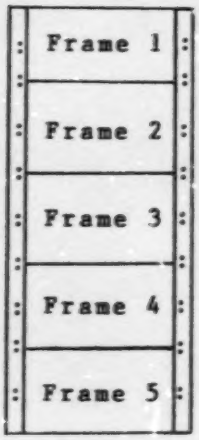
PEER ADVISING IN A SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Roberta Devlin-Scherer

HOW DID PEER ADVISING COME INTO THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS PICTURE?



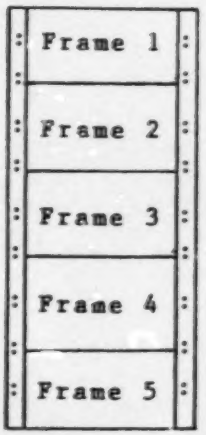
Advisees lining crowded hallways and stairs

Faculty laboring with heavy advising loads

Freshmen confused over choice of major

Seniors wondering about graduation requirements

Undergraduates looking for relationships and role models as well as preregistration signatures



The use of trained students to deliver services for other students on campus is a common practice. In many colleges and universities, students serve in various roles, as tutors, peer counselors, resident advisors, and orientation leaders. Frequently, personnel in Student Affairs find such assistance enables them to increase the depth and breadth of programming. In addition, they can vary services for students in a cost effective fashion. Ender, McCaffrey and Miller in their Guidelines for Trainers: Students Helping Students indicate that programs involving peer group assistance can have a

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positive impact on the development of college students (1979). Students in helping roles may serve as role models for successful behaviors.

Program Background

In 1981 students in the School of Business at Ithaca College, with administrative support, initiated the concept of peer advising to supplement faculty efforts. Other programs similar in nature were studied and personnel in Counseling were consulted in order to formulate the guidelines for a program in our School. Students in the pilot peer advising program were involved in responding to student questions, principally at preregistration time.

Peer advising has been developed in the School of Business for several reasons. A Task Force on Advising for Ithaca College had surveyed 665 students on the campus to assess the quality of advising services. Through classes or by mail the task force reached 15 percent of the students from each of five Schools. Survey questions attempted to discern student perceptions in a variety of areas on advising: advisor rapport; availability; knowledge of requirements in major and nonmajor areas; assistance in planning in academic and nonacademic matters; ability to refer; and overall effectiveness of conferences. Results for the School of Business, while adequate, were not as favorable as faculty hoped. For the past several years the faculty/student advisee ratio has exceeded the ability of faculty to be as attentive as they would like to be with their students. Additionally, it is believed that on

certain issues, students might be more comfortable approaching other students rather than faculty members. In order to increase personalized assistance, a group of students have been selected and trained in School of Business procedures, basic counseling and Ithaca College services. A position as a peer advisor recognizes skills of competent students and encourages them to share their experiences and information with other students. Thus the program increases opportunities for student responsibility as well.

Selection Process

Over a three-year period, the following guidelines and procedures have been established and followed in choosing peer advisors. Typically, twenty students have competed for positions and six to eight have been selected.

Candidates must have a 2.75 grade point average or above and submit an application with two faculty recommendations. Faculty recommendations are carefully screened. Readers look for the kinds of skills and personal qualities that a faculty member has observed in the candidate. The application form includes these general questions:

1. What characteristics do you think are important for a peer advisor to have?
2. What advising needs do business students have?
3. What course work have you completed that is related to academic advising/counseling (i.e., psychology, communications, marketing, etc.)?
4. Have you had any experience that you feel is relevant to your work as a peer advisor?

5. What do you see as benefits to you personally if you serve as a peer advisor?

6. Describe yourself showing what skills, qualities, values, attributes, etc., you have to become a good peer advisor (please attach a separate sheet).

A team of peer advisors and a faculty advisor review these applications for completeness and carefulness of responses. The committee looks for applicants' understanding of peer advising, its values for students and for themselves as well. The ways potential candidates view their background and course work in relation to a peer advising position is also examined. The responses are accorded a number of points by each reader and averaged. The application form, faculty recommendations, and grade point average are used for initial screening purposes, using the following grid, Chart I. Final applicants are invited for interviews.

Interviews of an hour in length are conducted with a faculty advisor and at least two peer advisors present. Each team of interviewers attempts to incorporate similar questions so that the candidates will be assessed in a similar way. Questions are designed with the idea in mind to see applicant responses to the common questions and the sometimes difficult situations that arise during peer conferences. Chart II lists selected questions used in interviews.

Chart I

PEER ADVISING CANDIDATES

(GRID FOR INITIAL "PAPERS" REVIEW)

Name	GPA	Year	Major	Related Course Work	Relevant Experience	Comments

Chart II

QUESTIONS FOR PEER ADVISING INTERVIEWS

1. Have you ever been to a peer advisor at the School of Business or elsewhere?

2. On what basis would you choose someone to be a peer advisor? If you were interviewing one of us, what would you want to know?

3. Do you have any ideas as to how you will become acquainted with advisees?

4. What if a student asked:

   a. what a good "gut" course is...
   b. which professor is really better...
   c. how competitive is it here...
   d. how much work is there to do...
   e. how many credits should I take...
   f. what is Professor _____ like...
   g. about a change of major and indicated his/her parents wanted him/her to stay with a Business major while s(he) is uncertain...

5. What are your opinions of Ithaca College and the School of Business (location, curriculum, students, diversity, facilities, other colleges).

6. If an advisee came to you for help with schedule planning, what kinds of things would you say?

7. What would be the hardest questions for you that a student might ask? Situations?

8. What services are available for students at Ithaca College?

9. What limits do you feel exist for the peer advisor?

10. What do you think would be valuable training for you as a peer advisor?

11. What do you believe would be benefits to you if you were a peer advisor?

12. What social activities could we plan together to unify us?

Applicants are evaluated on their interpersonal skills and their ability to think responsively and logically on their feet rather than having the right answer in mind. A training program is designed to familiarize them with policies and where to find information. When interviews are completed, the committee shares perceptions of each interview and writes comments. One rating scale used by the group is shown in Chart III. The whole group discusses each candidate and selections are made.

This selection process is time-consuming but essential. A good idea can become a quality program with the appropriate people. An investment of time in selection helps ensure effectiveness later.

Training

Preparing students for helping roles does not consume an inordinate amount of time in initial training. Carefully selected students have basic skills to become student helpers. Nonetheless, well-planned training sessions serve several purposes.

One critical purpose of a refined training program is to create group identity and pride. A second purpose is to familiarize new peer advisors with the details of policies and procedures related to School operations. Because of the immensity of detail related to policies and procedures, training of an ongoing nature is a necessity. Each session of a two-day training program is briefly described.

Team Building: This opening activity is a series of experiences drawn from basic group processes. These experiences

Chart III

PEER ADVISOR INTERVIEWING RATINGS

Interviewee_____
Interviewer_____
Date_____ Time_____

Rate interviewee on each item from 1 to 7 (7 is the best possible rating). Write comments in appropriate space.

Question Numbers			
A) Enthusiasm high energy that is sincere, expressed enthusiasm on College/Dept. programs and opportunities	Bored	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Highly Enthusiastic
B) Creativity original, innovative approach	Hum-Drum	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	New and Exciting!
C) Ability to Communicate articulates well, good eye contact, easily understood	Poor Ability	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Fantastic Speaker!
D) Commitment shows strong interest in Peer Advisors, committed as a student	Non-committal	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Highly Committed
E) Realistic Perspective on Ithaca Life objective, rounded out answers, offers variety of "opinions"	Highly Subjective	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Objective and Realistic
F) Listening Skills	Poor Listener	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	All Ears!
G) Overall Recommendation	Don't Do It!	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Take This Person!!

Additional Comments

What diversity would this person add to Peer Advisors?

are designed to assist the group in seeing themselves as a unit with common objectives. For example, a typical exercise might involve several members banding together to "Make a Machine," incorporating movement and noise. The remaining students guess the machine's identity and a new group shares their machine.

Basic Counseling Skills: An overview of stages of a counseling interview, opening/closing session, obtaining background information from the interviewee to gain a sense of the situation, useful counseling behaviors and paraphrasing skills are covered.

College-wide Support Services: Representatives of major student services conduct specialized sessions for the peer advisors.

The Writing and Reading Center: This heavily used resource offers sessions in proper use of sources, tutoring in writing, conversational English, vocabulary assessment, speed reading, memory exercises and study skills.

Educational Opportunity Program: Selected students who need additional tutoring in courses due to weak backgrounds and/or who need financial assistance take up this program. Peer advisors can provide an outreach to these students who may come to them with academic problems or with adjustment concerns.

Counseling Center: Testing opportunities for students are shared by Counseling Center personnel. Tests on interests, apptitude, and background enable students to make vocational choices and find out more about themselves. Training programs

such as assertiveness training, test anxiety, small group and individualized counseling are also available.

International Programs: The Ithaca College program abroad has approximately 100-115 students per year. Approximately one-half of these students are generated from Ithaca College and over twenty School of Business students participate yearly. The faculty is British. To enter the London Program a student must have a 2.75 average, letters of recommendation, and approval of his/her dean and advisor and provide an essay.

Internship opportunities abroad are competitive and acceptance for an internship is dependent upon the courses a student has taken, prior work experience, grade point average and letters of recommendation.

The Library: The library resource person in the library who deals primarily with Business School materials provides information on the present status of the library's collection. Pertinent catalogs and references are mentioned briefly. Strengths and weaknesses in the present collection are discussed. This presentation enables peer advisors to advise students on general library use.

Career Counseling Center: A tour of the Career Counseling Center is taken to look at materials and references and talk with counselors regarding their role in assisting students in uncovering employment opportunities.

Return-to-College Program: Occasionally students who are older seek advising. Ways of relating to these students and assisting them in practical problems (e.g., finding night

courses) of finding courses that fit within their program, as well as basic guidelines regarding transcript assessment, are discussed. These students are generally well prepared and are very specific in the information they are seeking.

Peer Advisor Notebook: Each participant receives a notebook of reading materials and on-the-job information for handy reference. The handouts are reviewed. Guidelines for the group are covered. Common forms, information required on them, and their purposes are noted.

Typical Questions Drill: Several experienced peer advisors head up a small group of novice advisors and ask them questions most frequently asked by students.

Role playing: Typical situations, more involved than routine questions, are enacted and appear in Chart IV. The concept of "when to refer" and limits of the peer advisor role are discussed as an outgrowth of these situations.

Ongoing training sessions maintain group skills and unity. A semester's plan is indicated in Chart V.

Chart IV

COMMON ROLE PLAY SITUATIONS FOR PEER ADVISING

My parents want me to take courses in accounting but I don't like math.

How do I fill out the forms for preregistration?

I don't want to take these required courses. Can I get out of them?

How do I find an elective?

If I want to change my major from accounting to personnel, what do I have to do? Will my courses all count?

Who would you recommend I take for my class in data processing?

How can I register for courses when I don't know what I want to do?

I came to IC to be a Finance major but I can't get into any of the courses! I'm not interested in anything else. How do I get an education here?

I am getting C's and D's in my electives (major) so my cum is low. Will I get kicked out of the Business School?

I am an exploratory major. I know the jobs are in business today. What is the best major and how do I get into it?

Chart V

SEMESTER TRAINING SESSIONS

Network Establishment	Peer Advising Team
Marketing Peer Advising	Tom Barley, Assistant Professor, Marketing
Self-directed Search	Career Counseling
Career Planning Center Tour	Career Counseling
Good/Bad Counseling	Videotape
Counseling Return-to-College Students	Susan Arledge, Return-to-College Coordinator
Interactive Counseling Session	Videotape
Aptitude and Interest Inventories	John Brown, Counseling Center

Responsibilities

The removed location of the School of Business on the fourteenth floor of the West Tower curtailed use of advising services. So, in the first year, peer advisors responded to routine student questions mainly at registration times. During succeeding years, while continuing to provide drop-in advising services to students, peer advisors have increased their responsibilities. They have situated themselves in the front of the Dean's Office of the New Building increasing their visibility and accessibility to students. They have extended School of Business advising to a variety of campus locations. The number of contacts and variety of questions they handle have increased. In addition to supplementing faculty advising, they have expanded their services in order to be of assistance to School of Business students. Peer advisors, in conjunction with Delta Mu Delta members, have developed four informative newsletters. Several peer advisors reviewed scholarship and other opportunities for students in order to provide information viewed as a high priority by students.

In a public arena, peer advisors have presented at Discovery Days sessions developed by the Admissions Office to introduce Ithaca College. They are frequently part of personal interviews with prospective students and their parents which occur all year. Representative advisors discuss the advising service with parents at Parents Weekend each fall as a segment of the School of Business program.

Evaluation

As an initial assessment we instituted the Peer Advisor Front Desk Request Form. This form tallied the number of requests made in certain categories. Of course, as in any institution, Ithaca College has its set forms, and students drop by the counter asking for a variety of forms that they have to complete. There are forms related to changes, such as school, major, advisor; registration, registering for a minor, for part-time student status; related to status in courses, adding, dropping or withdrawing; grades, changing grades, pass/fail forms, incomplete forms; and petitions, waiver for senior residency, petition for transfer credit. Peer advisors were available for students to describe these forms and to remind them of the various signatures they would need. Students also came to the front desk to ask for professor's hours or grader hours. They were interested in times for make-up exams, locations of graded papers or exam grades, or even a professor's office. In addition, peer advisors were often giving directions to people around the campus. The Financial Aid office and the Registrar's office were popular locations. Peers had information on deadlines--deadlines for internship proposals, mid-terms, add/drops, withdrawals, applications to transfer into the Business School and for scholarships. They described summer school course offerings for interested students. They provided control cards students needed to enter classes. When one thinks of all the processes and procedures that are part of surviving and getting through school, one begins to get the picture of a

very busy place in the front office; and in fact, peer advisors dealt with thirty to fifty requests such as these each day. The handling of these routine questions lightened the loads of both faculty and secretarial staff as well as providing an immediate service to students.

Students who had extended contacts (ten minutes or longer) with a peer advisor were requested to fill out a Peer Advising Assessment Form. A series of questions were designed to assess the atmosphere of the meeting, the extent and usefulness of information provided in the conference, and the overall effectiveness of the program. The response to the peer advising services was highly positive. Students who used the service were comfortable with the peer advisor. In addition, they felt that the peer advisor was well informed for the meetings. Effectiveness of the program was rated highly. Nearly all students surveyed indicated that they would recommend the service to their friends.

Open-ended responses to this service were grouped under the headings of Comfort Level, Adequacy of Preparation, and Client Satisfaction. Frequently repeated phrases in the remarks are reflected in an abbreviated fashion in the chart on the next page under these headings.

Generally, the comments refered to interpersonal and information skills of the peer advisors. Peer advisors were seen as relaxed, friendly, and enthusiastic. These qualities created an easy rapport between student-advisor and student-client. Students appreciated someone on their level; it

Chart VI

OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

Comfort Level

Were you comfortable speaking with the peer advisors? Why or why not?

common comments: "on my level"
"relaxed, friendly"
"knew how I felt"

Adequacy of Preparation

Did you feel the peer advisor was well prepared for your meeting? Why or why not?

common comments: "organized, knew where to find information"
"knew requirements"
"informative, helpful"

Client Satisfaction

Are you satisfied with the results of your visit with the peer advisor? Why or why not?

common comments: "my questions were answered"
"no longer confused"
"saved a lot of time"

was sometimes easier to relate to a student than a professor on certain issues. Listening skills and the time the peers were willing to spend with students were valued. In terms of informational skills, students remarked on the organization and preparation of peers for their interviews. The fact that they knew academic requirements and School policies was impressive to students who found the catalog confounding. Students left interviews feeling relieved because confusions they had had were cleared up through discussions with peers. Summary comments revealed that students saw the peer advisors as knowledgeable and helpful resources. These positive reactions to this service combined with its immediacy indicates that an organized peer advising program can be beneficial for both students and faculty.

With the rush of a large number of students to Schools of Business and relatively new faculty, academic advising services can suffer. Particularly in an undergraduate program students want a personal atmosphere and need guidance in a variety of areas from course selection to career possibilities. A peer advisor can be a helpful first stop for students seeking assistance in matters pertaining to academic affairs or personal concerns.

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